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SUBJ: PUBLIC OPINION STABLE IN WAKE OF OMAR KHADR DVD

REF: Ottawa 960

¶1. (SBU) A court-ordered release on July 16 of a DVD showing Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) personnel interviewing alleged Canadian terrorist Omar Khadr in 2003 at Guantanamo Bay has failed to sway public opinion. According to a recent poll, eight in ten Canadians who saw the interrogation footage did not subsequently change their views on Khadr. Televised excerpts of the DVD showed Khadr crying, showing his wounds, and complaining about sleep deprivation to CSIS agents.

¶2. (U) Public opinion concerning the Khadr case continues to be split evenly. According to a July 22 Toronto Star - Angus Reid poll, 38 percent of Canadians believe that the government should fight for Khadr's repatriation, while 38 percent think that he should face the military tribunal at Guantanamo Bay. Twenty percent of Canadians remain undecided on the issue. These results are nearly identical to polls taken before Canadians saw the footage of the interview.

¶3. (U) However, the new Angus Reid poll showed a slight increase in sympathy for Khadr. Previously, 31 percent of Canadians said they felt sympathetic to Khadr, although 46 percent said they did not. After the DVD's release, sympathetic Canadians grew to 36 percent, while those still unsympathetic fell to 41 percent.

¶4. (U) In a separate July 23 Ipsos Reid poll conducted for the National Post, of the 22 percent who had changed their beliefs due to the video, 18 percent said they had become more sympathetic to Khadr, while 4 percent were less sympathetic. However, out of the 78 percent of Canadians who were not swayed by the footage, 50 percent stated they are not empathetic to Khadr, with 27 percent expressing compassion for him. Overall, 60 percent of Canadians remain in favor of Khadr facing trial in the U.S., with 40 percent calling for his return to Canada, according to the Ipsos Reid poll. Ontario residents are the least supportive of the Toronto-born Khadr, with only 31 percent seeking his repatriation. Support for Khadr's return is highest in Atlantic Canada and Quebec, at 56 percent and 52 percent, respectively.

¶5. (U) Prime Minister Stephen Harper has not commented publicly on the DVD, but his new Director of Communications, Kory Teneycke, affirmed PM Harper's support for the U.S. military tribunal by stating that "there's a judicial process to deal with these serious charges that have been leveled against Mr. Khadr, and that process, not a political process, should determine his fate."

¶6. (SBU) Comment: The apparent hope of Khadr's Canadian and U.S. lawyers that dramatic footage of Khadr's tears and complaints about sleep deprivation in his meeting with CSIS officials would create a groundswell of more favorable public opinion and impel the government to reverse course seems to have failed. While a lively public debate in the media and various blogs continues about Khadr - whether a 15 year old should have been arrested in the first place, whether he should face trial in Guantanamo Bay or in Canada, whether the government should insist on his repatriation, whether there are legal grounds for a prosecution in Canada in lieu of the U.S. military tribunal, etc. - continues, the Parliamentary summer recess

(and lack of daily Question Period) and competing joys of the all-too-brief Canadian summer essentially have kept any genuine pressure off the government to change its policy, at least for the time being. Should the tribunal find Khadr guilty, the Canadian government will have another tough choice about whether to insist that he return to serve jail time in Canada instead of the U.S. The Qthat he return to serve jail time in Canada instead of the U.S. The Liberals and the New Democratic Party will insist on the affirmative, but popular sentiments against the entire Khadr family may make it easier for the government to do nothing.

WILKINS